

Quality Matters

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A Quarterly Newsletter of the Center for Educational Improvement and Quality Assurance (CEIQA)

St. Mary's University College

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Quote of this issue

"Quality means doing good when no one is looking."

Henry Ford (1863-1947)

This newsletter is published every three months by the Center for Educational Improvement and Quality Assurance (CEIQA) of St Mary's University College (SMUC). The Objective of the newsletter is to inform the SMUC community as well as interested public, private, non-governmental stakeholders about the activities and endeavors of the institution in fostering quality education and research in the Ethiopian Higher Education setting.

Tel.251-11-553 80 01/79 99

P.O.Box:1211

Email: ceirqa@smuc.edu.et

<http://www.stmarycollege.edu.et>

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Training Workshop on Quality Assurance Practices and Internal Quality Assurance Management

A Workshop on Higher Education Quality Assurance and Internal Quality Assurance Management Systems was held at SMUC from August 4 to August 5, 2010. The workshop was attended by the Executive Vice President and Associate Vice President as well as members of Internal Quality Assurance committees at all levels of the University College both from the conventional and distance division. The training aimed to build up common understanding on concepts of Quality Assurance Mechanisms and Quality Management Systems.

It was learnt that the workshop would help SMUC quality assurance committees at Senate, Faculty, Department, College, School, and Unit/Office levels; assess their strengths and weaknesses periodically and, continuously monitor and evaluate quality of the teaching learning process, research, community service as well as the administrative services they provide. It would also help to formulate plan of actions for internal quality assessment within their operational confines.

The Resource person for the training was Dr. Wondimagn Chekol from the Center for Educational Improvement and Quality Assurance and it was organized by the Office of Human Resource Development at SMUC. ■

From the Editorial Desk

In higher education it is difficult to define the concept of 'quality' as it differs depending on the interpretations and needs of different stakeholders. Nowadays, many actors are interested to know about what goes on inside each HEI. As a result there is no one common definition of the concept of quality in higher education. This is because different actors have special interests on quality for different purposes. Among some of the definitions given for quality in higher education are: quality as excellence, quality as fitness for purpose, quality as meeting certain threshold and quality as added value for money.

As part of the changes in the over all competitive knowledge society, many countries are making external quality assurance part of their higher education system. This includes both internal and external quality assurance system. Assuring quality in higher education is much more complicated as compared to that of the industrial sector since a higher education institution has multiple products and a multiple client system.

Assuring quality in higher education is primarily the responsibility of the higher education institution itself. Although the government has a special responsibility regarding quality assurance in many countries, it is the institution (especially its staff and students) that is responsible for providing and assuring quality.

The most commonly used model for quality assurance is the I-P-O model. In this model, input refers to educational resources and facilities, academic staff profile and student intake. Process reflects the educational methods, choice of curriculum (structure and content), the learning environment etc and output

refers to number of graduates, employability and performance of graduates in the world of work. With this model, higher education institutions assess their strength and weakness at institution or program level periodically and produce self assessment reports. In addition to this, they monitor and evaluate the teaching-learning process continuously.

In this edition, it is our pleasure to have included a perspective on the role of students in the enhancement of quality in higher education. In addition to this, an interview, and a research review in relation to quality perception in the eyes of different stakeholders are included. ■

Virtual Links

Ministry of Education

Web site: [http:// www.moe.gov.et](http://www.moe.gov.et)

Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency (Ethiopia)

Website: www.higher.edu.et

PROPHE- Programme for Research on Private Higher Education

Website: www.albany.edu/dept/eaps/prophe/

International Network for Quality Assurance Agency in Higher Education (INQAAHE)

Website: [http:// www.inqaahe.org](http://www.inqaahe.org)

Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (UK)

Website: <http://www.qaa.ac.uk>

Center for International Research on Higher Education

Website: http://bc.edu/bc_org/avp/soe/cihe

Quality and Standards Authority of Ethiopia

Website: <http://www.qsae.org/>

International Institute for Capacity Building in Africa

Website: <http://www.eric.ed.gov>

International Network for Higher Education in Africa (NHEA)

Website: <http://www.bc.edu>

International Network for quality assurance Agencies in higher Education

Website: <http://www.inqaahe.nl>

European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education

Website: <http://www.enqa.eu>

Asian Pacific Quality Network

Website: <http://www.apqn.org>

Ethiopian Knowledge and Technology Transfer Society (EKTTTS)

Website: <http://www.ekttts.org>

Association of African Universities (AAU)

Website: <http://www.aau.org>

News

Intranet Educational System (IES) launched

With a view to create better access for students and teachers to educational resources, St. Mary's launched Intranet Educational System brought by Vista Educational and Research Enterprise. The system helps the University College become more efficient and transparent in its engagement with its customers, students and teachers alike; and thereby contributes towards the enhancement of quality of its services.

The Intranet Educational System is a web based application package and incorporates three major applications, Registrar System Solution, Scheduler Solution and an Intranet solution for campus-wide users.■

Educational Testing Service of St. Mary's Certified

The Educational Testing Service, based in Princeton, New Jersey, USA, certified St. Mary's to administer TOFEL iBT (Test of English as a Foreign Language internet Based Test). The Educational Testing Service develops, administers and scores standard tests worldwide including TOEFL. The Testing Center at St. Mary's has successfully launched two test sessions on July 2010 in which 15 test takers were involved.

Based on the performances of test takers, the ETS scores the tests and releases the score online on the test takers profile in two weeks time after the test date. The scores in the TOEFL iBT provide scoring information, including the four skills section scores and a total

score, with a performance feedback together with an advice on how they can improve their language skills.

The Testing Center at St. Mary's is also preparing to administer upcoming tests scheduled for the months of August, September and October. The site administers internet-based format of TOEFL and is given online from a secure internet-based testing network. Anyone who wants to take the test can register online using the ETS website (www.ets.org/toefl).■

Training on Project Cycle Management

A two-day Project Cycle Management Training was given to St. Mary's staff on July 15th to 16th of July, 2010. The training is meant to help the exercise of Project Cycle Management in the institution. This actually helps all units of the institution be harmonized in such a way that they would be able to act in accordance with the strategic directions of planning and the framework developed for monitoring & evaluation of implementation. The training was organized and conducted by the Center for Educational Improvement and Quality Assurance (CEIQA).

Management bodies of the various major and sub units of the University College both from the conventional and distance division took part in the training offered in an interactive and participatory approach adopted to enable multi-directional (among trainers, from trainers to trainees, and the vice versa) knowledge transfer. Overall, sessions of presentations, group level practical exercises as well as group and general discussions were employed as part of the training process.■

Research Corner

Research Title: Quality: A Many-Headed Hydra? Quality Perception in the Eyes of Different Stakeholders

Date of Publication: A Research paper presented in the 3rd annual national research conference on Private Higher Education Institutions organized and conducted by St. Mary's University College, published in the proceedings of the third conference, August 2005.

Researchers: Philip Rayner (PhD) & Tesfaye Teshome (PhD)

The research paper describes the recent quantitative growth of Ethiopian Higher Education both in the conventional and open modality of education. The paper also highlights HERQA's external quality assurance system in safeguarding quality of the education in Ethiopian higher education system.

As the results of the findings show, all those involved in the Higher Education system recognize the crucial role of the agency in the higher education sector. However, there is one question that is only just recently started to be asked, "What is quality?" And its subsidiary question, "What does quality look like in the Ethiopian context?" Consultation is recognized as a key component in the process of defining and understanding what quality is. However, another question remains, "Consultation with whom?"

The list of possible stakeholders in the Higher Education process is a long one: government employers, students, parents and HEIs themselves (both managers and faculty), donors and probably others. Based on the

research undertaken in 2004 on Higher Education System Overhaul (HESO) and in 2005 for HERQA and the Higher Education Strategy Centre (HSC) plus relevant literature, this paper explore in more detail what is it that the various stakeholders in the Ethiopian Higher Education sector may expect or demand from Higher Education and how their particular agendas and perspectives will influence their own individual notions of what is meant by quality. The paper also explores what 'quality' means in an expanding and the growth of 'massif' Higher Education system and the lessons for the Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency. This paper suggests that it is perhaps unrealistic to expect all the stakeholders in Higher Education to agree and share a common definition of 'quality' except in its very broadest sense. However, for HERQA to ensure quality standard, it needs the support and cooperation of all the other stakeholders in Ethiopian Higher Education. 'Quality' cannot be achieved in isolation and it cannot be imposed from above. It has to be a communal effort. Eventually, all of those involved in the Higher Education Sector, both private and public, will need to work together to ensure that we are all 'doing the right things in the right way' ■

Forthcoming Event

INQAHE 2011 Conference

The 2011 Biennial Conference will take place in Madrid, Spain, from the 4th till the 7th of April, 2011. The National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation (ANECA) is hosting this conference.

The conference theme is "Quality Assurance: Foundation for the Future". For Further Information Visit <http://www.inqahe.org>. ■

Interview

This column features interviews of people including government officials, policy makers, educators, researchers, and presidents of universities or colleges as well as students on issues of importance in the higher education sector. This edition presents interview with Becki Quik - a Teaching Fellow at St. Mary's University College from the US.



Background

Becki Quik is an English Language Fellow at St. Mary's University College from the US. She has a Masters Degree in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) from the new school of New York City and a First Degree in Cultural Anthropology from Washington State University. She also has a certificate in TEFL from Seattle University.

Becki has taught English as a Foreign Language in her home country- USA as well as Hungary, Spain and Nepal for almost 17 years. She has coordinated, managed and instructed English courses for immigrants and refugees. She came to Ethiopia on October 2009 through a US State Department's Fellowship Programme and has co-taught English classes and now is in the process of establishing an English Language Resource Center for students and teachers.■

Quality Matters: *Becki, these days I see you going up and down the stairs in Building 1. What's up?*

Becki: We are opening up an English Language Resource Center in Room 403. I'm running up and down the stairs to carry supplies, check on materials, paint etc. It is starting as an 'English' Resource Center, but hopefully it will expand to different languages in the very near future. At that time, we may drop the 'English' and deem it the 'Language Resource Center'.

The Language Resource Center will be a place where students and St. Mary's staff can drop in at almost any time and read magazines in English, check out English books (fiction, non-fiction, poetry etc.), browse the internet, listen to English pod casts, receive tutoring, attend English language workshops, movie evenings, check a bulletin board of events in Addis that will feature English in some way, etc. The Resource Center welcomes any ideas or suggestions from students or faculty on what to include or how to use the space.

Quality Matters: *What made you think establish an English Resource Center? Have you done any needs assessment?*

Becki: My needs assessment has mainly been through observation and student requests. I have observed ►►

a few things in my months at St. Mary's. Firstly, there is a real need to improve the English language skills of many students. The proficiencies are widely varied when it comes to English skills. This can make classroom learning a real challenge for teachers and students. For the teacher, it can be difficult to target the various needs of a multi-level classroom. For the student, the pace and content of the class can be frustrating. The Language Resource Center will be a space for students to learn at their own pace and level.

My second observation is that St. Mary's students already have good English teachers.

Another English teacher for another English class does not feel particularly needed here. However, setting up a support center to reinforce the English of fluent speakers and aid the students that are still struggling, seems a better use of my efforts. English should be something visited through a variety of media. The classroom is just one medium of English learning. Others include reading and listening to English through authentic materials. Even if it is a magazine about the latest pop star in England or writing an e-mail, students are picking up and practicing grammar, mechanics, semantics etc.

My third observation is with college-aged students in general. I know another academic class is not always appealing to a student who has a full schedule. I tried supplementary English classes for those interests. These didn't work for a number of reasons. One was the average student did not have the time nor the interest to attend another class. The Resource Center will be a more informal place for students to drop in on their free

time. It will not be a stressful or particularly academically-oriented space. It will be a space for students to explore the world through English, whether that is thought movies, magazines, books, the internet or whatever events we have planned.

On top of these observations, some students have asked me if I have any books in English they could borrow, or if I have any spare time to tutor or simply practice English with them. All of these requests will come to fruition at the Resource Center.

Quality Matters: *What objectives have you set?*

Becki: To improve English skills and expose students to world culture, media and news. Also, this Center should support reading for pleasure. The Center will have as many genres of books and magazines that we can find. The aim of this is to appeal to as many interests as possible. Reading should be fun and voluntary - it can't be valued by a student if it is only forced upon them.

Quality Matters: *Have you started to work on your project?*

Becki: Kelemua Mekonnen, Head of the Student Support Services at SMUC, and I started conceptualizing the space early this year. It has been a slow process but it is happening little by little. I have a feeling it will be an ongoing project even when it is up and running.

Quality Matters: *What do you really need to establish the center?*

Becki: The center can only be established if there is student and faculty interest and input.

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Perspective

The Role of Students in the Enhancement of Quality of Higher Education

By : Mesfin Tekleab,
CEIQA

Higher education is central to societal development, and vital to competitiveness in an increasingly globalizing knowledge society. A new range of competencies, such as adaptability, team work, communication skills, and the motivation for continual learning, have become critical. Thus, higher education institutions are challenged to adjust their program structures, curricula, teaching and learning methods to adapt to these new demands. This article highlights the potential role of students in the enhancement and sustenance of quality in higher education.

Sub-Saharan Africa, with about 740 million people and 200 public universities is now grappling with issues of quality at the tertiary level in the face of increasing number of private higher education institutions and the lowest tertiary gross enrolment ratio in the world. Rapid growth in enrolments amidst declining budgets during the 1980s and 1990s, the proliferation of private provision of higher education and pressure from a rapidly transforming labour market have combined to raise new concerns about quality (Materu, 2007).

Quality in higher education could be judged by the extent to which intended outcomes are achieved and considers inputs (resources and staff profile), processes (student admission, teaching, learning, assessment), and outcomes (graduates employability & achievements, research results). It also remains to be a concern with respect to the entitlements of learners to higher education with academic standards that reflect national expectations and awards that meet published specifications; the responsibilities of higher education institutions to protect academic standards and

quality; and the validity of the public interest in higher education – an important contributor to the well-being, interests and prosperity of the country.

Quality Assurance, as defined by Materu (2007), is a planned and systematic review of an institution or program to determine whether or not acceptable standards of education, scholarship, and infrastructure are being met, maintained and enhanced. It entails an institutional (or program) self-assessment, a peer review, and an institutional audit with site visit by Quality Assurance Agency and transmission of findings to the institution, the government and even to stakeholders.

In this regard, students are the most important stakeholders of higher education systems and that of quality assurance mechanisms therein because they are actively engaged in the process of teaching and learning and offer a valuable insight into the day-to-day operation of an higher education institutions. For instance, UK's Quality Assurance Agency (2005) places students at the heart of institutional audit and the audit process itself. Hence, among others, relating to the student learning experience, student representation at operational and institutional level, and institutions' arrangements for obtaining feedback from students, graduates and employers are important.

In some higher learning institutions in Ethiopia, according to Zerihun (2006), there is a system of student evaluation of the quality of teaching, with the feedback communicated to the teachers through the departments, while in others the form is filled out as a ritual and nothing happens afterwards, or at times the evaluation may not even be conducted. What is more amazing is that the students do not know about how their comments on the teaching effectiveness were ►►

considered, if at all, by the departments or the instructors. Moreover, in all the institutions, there is no systematic procedure to evaluate courses, especially based on comments provided from students.

A similar observation was made in an assessment of students' reactions to the quality of the programs conducted at one of the Universities where the students indicated that they could have contributed to the improvement in the curriculum and courses although, according to them, there is no such a practice of involving students in program evaluation of their institution. (Rayner and Tesfaye, 2005 cited in Zerihun, 2006).

A significant limitation identified, regarding representation of students in quality assurance process, is a failure 'to close the loop' and provide feedback on the outcomes of student participation in decision-making to those not directly involved. There is also a difficulty of recruiting student representatives and overcoming their reluctance to attend meetings regularly (QAA, 2005).

The involvement of students is, therefore, integral to both internal & external quality assurance systems. However, the way in which students and their representatives are involved may differ (QAA, 2005). Institutional audit /reviews by Quality Assurance Agency in UK involve students and student representatives as significant parts of the process. All methods, according to Bohrer (2006), include: Auditors/ reviewers meeting with students groups and student representatives; documentation about institutions which is provided for auditors /reviewers before any external quality assurance visit. Students are invited to prepare a written submission to brief the audit team. It was clear that students welcomed the opportunity to provide their considered view to the audit team in

writing, and the audit process derived great benefit from the constructive and thoughtful written submissions made by students (QAA, 2006).

(National) students representatives are included as full members of the review teams. Institutional information provided on the Teaching Quality Information web site is complimented by results from the National Student Survey. Four particular questions proved to be useful stimuli for eliciting students' views in a way that is particularly helpful to an audit team. How accurate is the information that the institution publishes? Do students know what is expected of them? What is the student experience as a learner like? Do students have a voice in the institution, and is it listened to?

In the case of internal audit or self-assessment of an institution, students participate in decision making processes through representation in various forms and at different levels. At the higher levels, they can take part in 'key' or 'appropriate' committees such as the governing body or senate; committees concerned with learning and teaching, quality assurance & student experiences; and working groups, consultation exercises and focus groups (Bohrer, 2006).

At operational or departmental level, student representation can be in the form of membership of program or course committees; departmental, school or faculty committees; or staff – student liaison, consultative or advisory committees. Students can also provide the institution with considerable information, as a feedback, in various self-assessment practices, including satisfaction survey, graduate tracer study, instructor's evaluation, and teaching and assessment processes.

The potential role of students in education quality

enhancement is also highly recognized by SMUC. A number of assessments, surveys & studies have been conducted based on students' feedback and aiming at improvement of quality of education. Student Satisfaction, Instructors' Assessment Methods, Instructors' Course Planning, Graduate Tracer Study, Student Evaluation of Instructors could be mentionable among others.

Recently, students are also being involved in the consultation and decision-making processes of major academic divisions or Faculties of SMUC. According to the annual performance reports (2001 EC) of Law and Business Faculties, representatives of students in the respective Faculties have been elected and are participating in the regular meetings of Academic Council since last year.■

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Quality Matters: *How are you, then, to go about it?*

Becki: I have already put the word out to students in my latest English classes. I have made an announcement at the Friday Talk Show. At the Friday Talk Show, I have a suggestion box for what students would like to see in the Center, so I am working with that feedback. I have announced it to most of the English faculty, although informally. Hopefully, mentioning it in this newsletter will give it more exposure to the St. Mary's faculty and staff.

Quality Matters: *How far have you gone so far?*

Becki: We have a small library of English books and audio, magazines, tables, chairs, computers, internet, and a white board. We will keep adding materials and ideas as we go.

Quality Matters: *Do you think the Resource Center will start functioning very soon?*

Becki: It is already functioning. I have the hours posted on the door. It is not open full time at this point as we are still adding material and I will be leaving soon for a two-month break. However, we are open half days during the week. We will have a grand opening when I come back to St. Mary's in October. At this point, the events, tutoring, workshops and movie evenings will start to be scheduled into the resource hours as well.

Quality Matters: *Do you have something to say about the project?*

Becki: Yes, someone once said, 'the whole process of education is to turn mirrors into windows.' Although the thrust of this Center is to improve English, it is also to expose students to the different worlds that exist outside of their own reality. Sometimes, this comes through a book, or the internet, or listening to music. This Center should be a place that promotes lounging and thinking, as well as independent learning.■

Fun Corner

As you are aware, ships have long been characterized as being female (e.g., “Steady as she goes” or ‘she’s listening to starboard, Captain!’”)

Recently, a group of computer scientists (all males) announced that computers should also be referred to as being female. Their reasons for drawing this conclusion follow:

Five reasons to believe computers are female:

1. No one but the Creator understands their internal logic.
2. The native language they use to communicate with other computers is incomprehensible to everyone else.
3. The message “Bad command or file name” is about as informative as, “If you don’t know why I’m mad at you, then I’m certainly not going to tell you.”
4. Even your smallest mistakes are stored in long-term memory for later retrieval.
5. As soon as you make a commitment to one, you find yourself spending half your pay check on accessories for it.

However, another group of computer scientists, (all female) think that computers should be referred to as if they were male. Their reasons follow.

The five reasons to believe computers are male:

1. They have a lot of data but are still clueless.
2. They are supposed to help you solve problems but half the time they are the problem.

3. As soon as you commit to one you realize that, if you had waited a little longer, you could have obtained a better model
4. In order to get their attention, you have to turn them on.
5. Big power surges knock them out for the rest of the night.■

Source: the Internet.

Managing Editor

Markos Mezmur

Layout Designer

Befekadu Hailu

Center for Educational Improvement and Quality Assurance (CEIQA)
St. Mary’s University College (SMUC)

Tel. 251-115-53 80 01/ 53 79 99

P.O.Box:1211

Email:ceirqa@smuc.edu.et

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.



If you have comments on this issue of the newsletter or would like to contribute to future issues, please contact our office on 011 553 79 99 Ext 145 Or email: ceirqa@smuc.edu.et

Photo Gallery

Project Cycle Management Training July 2010



St. Mary's University College

Institutional Goals

In order to meet and exceed the quality and standard requirements of students and stakeholders, the goals of SMUC are to:

- ▶ Offer relevant, diverse, learner-centered, and research-led programs of study;
- ▶ Prepare graduates with the requisite knowledge, skills and attitudes embodied in the graduate profile of academic programmes;
- ▶ Strengthen assessment methods that validly, reliably and fairly evaluate measurable learning outcomes;
- ▶ Promote technology-based, innovative and inter-disciplinary learning environment;
- ▶ Augment student support, staff development, facilities and resources;
- ▶ Undertake demand-driven research on local, national and international issues and problems;
- ▶ Produce and disseminate research outcomes, teaching materials and other publications;
- ▶ Ensure the provision of need-based services to the community at large;
- ▶ Initiate, sustain and enhance a close network with local and international stakeholders; and
- ▶ Put in place a system that ensures responsibility and accountability towards the performance of tasks related with the attainment of the goals enshrined herein.